

UPDATE ON STAYCATION PROPOSALS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Tourism and hospitality is a very important industry for Argyll and Bute and has been badly impacted by the onset of the pandemic given the need to introduce a series of restrictions including two extended periods of lockdown where movement of people and the ability of many businesses to open were curtailed by requirements of the Scottish Government.
- 1.2 To assist with the recovery of the tourism industry and in anticipation of additional staycation visitor pressures on local communities the Council allocated two funding pots at the February budget. A sum of £500,000 was allocated to support the delivery of a range of facilities across Argyll and Bute necessary to support camping and caravan staycations. This will include provision of additional waste disposal facilities to be available prior to the summer of 2021 and other facilities that will be informed by the Motorhome and Informal Camping Survey. Additional wardens to be employed over the period April to October 2021 to raise awareness in respect of camping responsibly. A further £300,000 of investment was allocated to marketing Argyll and Bute as Scotland's premier staycation destination.
- 1.3 On Tuesday 13 April 2021 the First Minister announced an update to the route map out of lockdown and this meant free movement within Scotland (including our islands) from 16 April 2021 (no overnight stays allowed) and tourism fully opening for business on 26 April 2021 including UK wide visitors being allowed to visit.
- 1.4 The delivery of new infrastructure on the ground is challenging given the willingness, or ability of people to assist us and our initial focus has been on making best use of existing facilities such as our public toilets, council car parks, existing private and community sites. The roll out of new infrastructure (temporary and permanent) will continue over the next few months and we will also be taking forward a series of larger scale interventions to be put in place for the following summer. For example, we have secured all funding for a new Tobermory carpark facility on the edge of the village centre. We are also continuing to encourage the private sector to invest in catering for the new trends of tourism through creating new facilities and/or through further investments with the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund
- 1.5 A number of actions across council services have been identified to help to

mitigate any potential negative effects on our rural environment and the perception of the tourism industry with our local communities. These actions will continue to grow as we respond to new pressures and can take advantage of Government funding that is being distributed by third parties through highly competitive processes which we have to prepare bids for. These actions are noted in **Appendix 1**.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Members consider the progress to date and note that this is an evolving process with milestones throughout the year and beyond.

3.0 DETAIL

- 3.1 When restrictions were lifted in late July 2020 there was a significant influx of staycation visitors into Argyll and Bute, particularly in and around Loch Lomond and a number of key hot spots. The Council worked closely with a number of agencies including the National Park, Police Scotland, Transport Scotland to help mitigate against the surge in numbers at a point in time when many facilities that visitors would normally expect to see and make use of remained closed. Actions included putting in place new Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders, opening up car parks that had been closed due to Covid-19 requirements and providing additional collections of refuse at known key locations where this could be accommodated. Numerous measures that were put in place during 2020 remain in place and these arrangements will form a sound foundation for this coming season.
- 3.2 It is worth pointing out that whilst there were literally hundreds of campervans and campers across Argyll and Bute last year, the vast majority of these were responsible and respectful of our communities and outstanding environment. Unfortunately, there were a minority of individuals who were not responsible in their behaviour and this resulted in a number of contacts to both Elected Members and officers regarding instances at numerous locations.
- 3.3 Members should also note that in July 2020 when travel restrictions were lifted and an influx of campers and caravans visited Argyll and Bute there were very few publically available facilities open – most public toilets, pubs, restaurants, cafes etc remained closed. From 26 April 2021 all these facilities are able to open albeit some may have restricted hours. This is a fundamental difference to July last year and as a result it is anticipated that the impact of people travelling into the area for a staycation experience will be less than last year and more similar to a normal holiday season with a likely increase in numbers and social distancing. In our rural and coastal communities there should be sufficient space to successfully ‘accommodate’ the staycation visitors.

3.4 Proposed activities

- 3.4.1 **Waste disposal facilities for camping/campervans.** We are investigating options for a third party to take responsibility for the new facilities and providers across Argyll and Bute have been engaged with a mixed response. Where there is no third party provider, then the Council will step in to provide the facility. Options will vary depending on what infrastructure exists in each location but is likely to be either a direct connection to a Scottish Water sewer where this can be secured and Officers are investigating other options for leasing tanks that will be emptied and cleaned on a regular basis by the leasing company. Work has also been underway to identify within the regulatory environment and operationally, how additional chemical waste disposal points might be provided as efficiently as possible.
- 3.4.2 **Public Toilets.** The majority of Council run Public Toilets were opened on 1st April 2021, with the remainder to open following repair works which were well advanced at the time of writing this report.
- 3.4.3 **Car Parking for Campervans Overnight.** A number of sites have been identified and will be publicised as available for potential parking sites during the day with potential for overnight stays as part of a pilot project which will be monitored. This will only be available for campervans who are self-sufficient and have a toilet due to there being no waste facilities available in most identified council locations. There will be a requirement, to comply with fire safety, for any campervan to keep a minimum of 6 metres from any other vehicle, spacings will be marked on the car parks and these markings will be displayed on the website for ease of identification. The sites will have appropriate signage identifying the maximum number of campervans that can stay at the site. Further signage will be provided identifying where the nearest waste disposal site can be found (this signage only to be provided in situations where there is a disposal facility nearby).

The main method of communication will be via the council website where sites will be identified together with advice and information relevant to campervans appropriate spacing. Sites are detailed at **Appendix 2**. It should be noted that no public consultation has taken place regarding these proposals, rather it is proposed that the pilot project will monitor any feedback from communities which will be considered for future years staycation planning. It should also be noted that all efforts will be made to direct staycation visitors to existing commercial facilities. The council pilot provision is being offered as an addition to help plug any gaps in the market and also to help to minimise inappropriate parking.

- 3.4.4 **General Waste.** Visitors will be directed that the main place to dispose of general waste is the Civic Amenity Sites that are situated across Argyll and Bute. Experience has shown that additional bins, particularly in laybys, leads to fly tipping and abuse. It is the intention of the service to monitor the use of the various sites and the number of

staycation visitors with a view to adjusting waste capacity and potentially providing additional sites depending on demand. The council is also looking to enter a partnership with the GRAB Trust and Live Argyll to promote a general anti-littering campaign across Argyll and Bute including interacting with local businesses, new anti-littering hubs and additional temporary staff to encourage community and visitor litter pickups. The message is leave no trace and take your litter home wherever possible, or make use of established recycling or waste sites that are located throughout Argyll and Bute.

Roads and Infrastructure will monitor the use of various sites and, where necessary, may provide additional bin capacity. The message will continue to be broadcast via social media for people to take their rubbish home with them.

- 3.4.5 **Additional Warden Posts and Staycation Officer.** Recruitment is underway for the additional warden posts with any gap being made up through overtime payments. Out of hours cover is part of the focus with all available wardens being included in the pool of possible available assets to deploy. We are continuing to look at community comments received through the survey we carried out earlier this year which helped identify hotspots. We have also taken into account the views of local councillors who speak to communities on a regular basis.

The four additional wardens working with existing council staff will cover the 120 car parks the council is responsible for along with on-street parking together with a number of other sites that may be subject to additional littering pressures. This means that the wardens cannot be in every location every day but by rotating the new wardens alongside the existing wardens, we will endeavour to provide as much cover as we can. It is also proposed that the wardens will work with police officers to carry out enforcement work as appropriate particularly where damage or littering has taken place. An agreement has been made on additional hours for enforcement activity with police.

To provide additional capacity in the economic growth team a temporary Staycation Officer post has been through job evaluation and is now in post.

- 3.4.6 **Web pages and Social media posts.** To help visitors holiday responsibly in Argyll and Bute, we have developed a new space on our website that brings together information about visiting safely, looking after our countryside, and leaving no trace. The link to the pages can be found here: [Have a great time. Be a great visitor. \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk) Additional information is continued to be sourced and added to the pages as appropriate and we have produced an initial communications plan. There is a big focus on national information and education working alongside the National Park together with other partner agencies such as VisitScotland, CalMac and NatureScot. In addition to digital communication including regular social media posts,

we will also display information posters on FACTS, being Covid safe and being a responsible visitor in key locations. More localised detail has also been provided by a limited print run of leaflets, for example, on Mull.

- 3.4.7 We have submitted our own bid for additional funding to Naturescot and are also working in supporting community bids for additional funding from the likes of HIE, Naturescot and other organisations as appropriate.

3.5 Expenditure on Staycation

- 3.5.1 At the February 2021 budget meeting, the Council approved an additional £500,000 to support staycation and a further £300,000 to support marketing Argyll and Bute. The Council agreed the following:

“Additional funds to be spent across 2021/22 and 2022/23 to support the delivery of a range of facilities across Argyll and Bute necessary to support camping and caravan staycations. This will include provision of additional waste disposal facilities to be available prior to the summer of 2021 and other facilities that will be information by the Motorhome and Information Camping Survey. Additional wardens to be employed over the period April to October 2021 to raise awareness in respect of camping responsibly. A further £300,000 of investment was allocated to marketing Argyll and Bute as Scotland’s premier staycation destination. These staycation investments to be progressed as early as possible by the Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Infrastructure in consultation with the Council Leader, Depute Leader and Leader of the largest Opposition Group, who comprise the COVID-19 Leadership Group.”

- 3.5.2 As can be seen from this report, officers have been working at pace to get new facilities and infrastructure in place as soon as possible. In order to avoid any delays in progressing, the Executive Director has received delegated authority from the Leader, the Depute Leader and the Leader of the Main opposition to be able to make decisions on the investments/infrastructure/facilities up to £20,000 that would clearly be within the scope of staycation measures. Anything above this limit would require individual approval from the Leader, the Depute Leader and the Leader of the Main opposition. It was further agreed that any expenditure either already spent or committed would be reported to the EDI Committee.

- 3.5.3 The expenditure already spent or committed at the time of writing this report is detailed within **Appendix 3**.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Tourism is an extremely important industry for Argyll and Bute employing thousands of local people and supporting hundreds of businesses and key

community facilities such as our leisure centres. The council is working with numerous partners to implement a series of interventions to deal with the onset of staycation pressures following the re-opening of tourism on 26 April 2021.

- 4.2 A number of key interventions have been put in place and staff are working to take forward new infrastructure as quickly as regulations will allow us to do so. **Appendix 1** attached to this report includes current actions being taken forward and this will be added to as and when new initiatives are identified.
- 4.3 Members are asked to note the progress made and recognise that it will take time for some actions to be put in place due to the need to comply with regulations. Wherever possible we are working with partners including CPP partners, national public bodies, community groups and the private sector.
- 4.4 It needs to be remembered the vast majority of our visitors are responsible people who respect our outstanding environment. Some people however need further help to understand what is required to behave responsibly and this is the focus of our interventions going forward together with additional measures to address known hotspots. Have a great time and be a great visitor.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy - The Council supports a strong economy with tourism identified as a priority sector.
- 5.2 Financial - A budget of £500k has been made available to deal with staycation pressures for this financial year.
- 5.3 Legal - None.
- 5.4 HR - The council has approved the temporary employment of 4 additional wardens and 1 staycation officer
- 5.5 Fairer Scotland Duty:
 - 5.5.1 Equalities - None.
 - 5.5.2 Socio-economic Duty - This intervention will assist the local economy.
 - 5.5.3 Islands - Staycation interventions will also apply to our island communities.
- 5.6 Risk - Littering and Health and Safety issues arising from informal toilet waste disposal.
- 5.7 Customer Service - Information is being communicated in difference formats to our customers.

**Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth:
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Councillor Robin Currie, Council Leader

11 May 2021

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – List of actions being taken forward.

Appendix 2 – List of car parks to be publicised via the council web site as sites that can be used to overnight for self-contained campervans with toilet facilities.

Appendix 3 – Expenditure on Staycation